

The Ballarat Naturalist

April 2016



Members' Images: Fruits and Seeds Presentations

Andy Arnold

My presentation resulted from photos taken on a bush camping trip we did in Namibia in September, 2009 to the Namib Desert near Swakopmund. On our free day we arranged to go on the “Moonscape tour” of the desert from Swakopmund. During this tour we were amazed by several desert plants and their flowers, fruits and seeds. The first, a “Tree” - the Welwitschia is a very unusual and unique gymnosperm in an order of its own but most closely related to Order Pinales (pines, larches and spruces) which places Welwitschia between the majority of the gymnosperms and the most primitive angiosperms (flowering plants).

Photo: Welwitschia *mirabilis* with strip-like leaves



Plants are female or male and appear to depend upon insects to carry out pollination. There appears to be little likelihood of wind

pollination as plants are often widely spaced and the pollen is very sticky. The male cones are much smaller and of course do not have seeds as they are the pollen producers.



It is believed that as yet there is no

Photo: Female Welwitschia mirabilis with mature cones (fruits) still intact and not yet shedding papery seeds. The insects are young nymphs of the Order Heteroptera (True Bugs)



Photo: Papery winged seed of *Welwitschia mirabilis*

direct evidence that *Probergrothius* (*Odontopus*) *sempunctatis*, the *Welwitschia* bugs pollinate female cones. However there has been evidence collected that there could be fertilization by the activity of some species of bees and wasps.

Photo: *Acanthosicyos horridus* (nara Nama, botterpitte, Afrikaans), female plant with typical fruit.



The second is a “Shrub” – a leafless spiny, flowering shrub which is a member of the *Curcubit* family and is found in dune habitats and is endemic to the dune areas of the Namib desert but only found in mobile dunes. It is an important plant for the local people with nutritious fruits, tasty with very oily rich inner kernels which are used in foods including confectionary. Long 10 m tap roots can extract water from underground sources. Like the other desert plant, *Welwitschia*, that I described earlier, it has male and female plants with the female plant bearing fruits containing the seeds.

Val Hocking

Val showed photos of the attractive red Mountain Berry and the purple Cheese Berry seen on Mt Wellington during the Hobart ANN. She also had photos of coastal seeds and fruits noticed while on bush walks in Portland district last January, plus stunning red-flowering gum blossoms and nuts that were seen in the Botanic gardens.

Claire and Peter Dalman

Claire and Peter showed images of plants from travels to the Kimberley, Newhaven, Innamincka and Windorah. A few plants had specimens including Boab, Cotton, Screw Pine and Quandong. A Buffel Grass photo created discussion. It was planted as fodder but

has become a widespread weed out-competing native plants and requiring much time, effort and money in eradication attempts in northern areas.

Helen Burgess has collected interesting seeds and their cases over many years so a box of these was shown and the differing shapes admired.

John Gregurke

John showed a variety of fruits and seeds of plants growing in Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. Plants shown included Kangaroo Grass, Austral Grass-tree, She-oak, Gum trees, Wattle Hakea and Banksia. The final slide was a Banksia cone where the follicles containing seed resembled a big, bad, bank-sia man.

Photo: Banksia man



Banksia - Paul Norquay and Postscript from Bill Murphy

In an email from Bill, post the meeting: “On my recent stay at Lakes Entrance I was intrigued with the lovely Coastal Banksia *integrifolia*.

Unfortunately I thought the seeds would be nowhere near out of the follicles in time for our meeting. However I packed one of the fruits in my bag to bring home Unpacking my case in Ballarat I was amazed to find that the warmth of the case had opened the follicles and the seed was exposed.”



Photo: Banksia *integrifolia*

Other contributors:

Peter Noble alerted many of us to the interesting facts about corn cobs using individual cobs for us to examine.

Steve Sorrell quizzed us with photos of a blueberry and a strawberry at various magnifications.

Emily Noble amused us with her method of controlling the spread of weed seeds with an industrial vacuum cleaner.

John Petheram discussed definition of *fruit* referring to edible fruits of Africa.

Hepburn Shire water reserves excursion - 6th March

In what was predicted to be a hot day, eight members were led by Claire and Peter Dalman on the planned excursion to Hepburn Shire water reserves.

The first stop was at Calembeen Lake in Creswick. Previously Tawny Frogmouths have been seen here and a sighting was hoped for. It was "Clean up Australia" day so members had brought bags to collect rubbish. Here the water lilies, although not native, looked spectacular and there were good specimens of Kangaroo Apple. Ten species of birds were seen or heard, but not the Tawny Frogmouth.

Next it was off to Newlyn Reservoir for a pleasant morning tea under the shade of trees. Eight bird species were seen with only one being a repeat.

Les took the lead from here and guided us to Hepburn Lagoon, but we were unable to determine whether the track-in was public access so we observed from a high point on the road. There were certainly birds on the water but without a telescope only the large species, in particular Pelicans, Swan and Straw-necked Ibis could be identified. The rest were just little blobs.

Returning to St. Georges Lake we then left the group where they intended to walk before lunch.

Thanks to John Gregurke for planning the day even though he was unable to attend.

Birds observed -

Calambeen Lake: Butcherbird (heard), Black Duck, Little Black Cormorant, Grey Fantail, Kookaburra, Eurasian Coot, Purple Swamphen, Magpie, Masked Lapwing, and Dusky Moorhen.

Newlyn Reservoir: Eurasian Coot, Musk Duck, Straw-necked Ibis, Black Swan, Fairy Wren, Cattle Egret, Pelican and White-faced Heron.

Hepburn Lagoon: Pelican, Black swan, Straw-necked Ibis and lots of smaller unidentified birds.

Claire and Peter Dalman

Completion of Signage Project, La Gerche Trail, Creswick

Photo: Members of FNCB with others at the opening

On 23 February it was great to see so many FNCB members at the 'Opening' of the re-signposted La Gerche Trail organised by Parks Victoria. The accolades for our part in the project have been profuse, even embarrassing at times because the work was shared by so many members who received no acknowledgement at all. Support from the committee was incredible and every time help was needed someone was happy to assist - from the first 'signage workshop', to identifying and labelling tree species, and then clearing branches around plants and signs.



Photo: John Petheram near one of signs



Too many people to mention all - but I would like to specially thank Les and Emily for doing paperwork and finances, John G and Andy for plant ID and biodiversity signage, and Marg for proofreading signs, and Mike for transport. Elspeth Swan's rapid and skilful work on the website and QR Codes was invaluable. Many thanks also to Parks Victoria staff David Newton and Kyra Wynduss, and Eugene for putting up signs, and to graphic artist Liz Skrokov. The Creswick Community are very proud

of their Trail and we commend them for their part in improving this great asset.

John Petheram

Emily wrote in Minutes: 27 people attended, including 11 FNCB members and the local Member of Parliament, Parks Vic staff. All appreciative of the work undertaken by FNCB, especially John P. John gave an entertaining

President's Report to the FNCB Annual General Meeting 4th March, 2016

I am pleased to present the President's report for the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc. for the 2015/2016 year.

Meetings are held at the Ballarat University building on the corner of Gregory Street and Gillies Road. We have a membership of 52 and meeting attendances in the high 20s.

We began the year, in March, hosting the autumn SEANA camp. We were again based at Pax Hill scout camp with people accommodated there or at other locations. Many members helped in a variety of ways so that at the weekend's end we felt we had run an enjoyable and worthwhile camp in a season not known for obvious natural history charms. Members led trips, sorted out housekeeping issues, baked, tidied, decorated, cleaned and socialised – always an important part of such gatherings. Emily Noble delivered an excellent initial Ballarat district presentation and Martin Scuffins brought in a barn owl for us to meet. He spoke about raptor rescue and rehabilitation, when possible, of raptors which had a mishap.

In April Neil Macumber showed us Western Australia plants and John Petheram lead us on a La Gerche forest trail walk. The La Gerche walk occupied much time and effort from some members over months.

In May Val Hocking told us about Mongolia and showed images most of us are unlikely ever to see. John Gregurke showed us the experiences he and Elaine shared in Cape York. John then led an excursion to Mt Cole.

In June Neville Oddie spoke about conservation and farming. It now seems a long time since we planted anchor plants on his property with Neville's help. Les Hanrahan led a fungi excursion.

Claire and I missed club members images in July entitled "Understanding our Natural World" but believe it was really good as people shared personal experiences and responses to the natural world. Emily Noble led a trip to Dereel, mostly seeking orchids.

Several club members who attended Hobart for the 2014 ANN get-together showed their images in August and John Gregurke led a field trip to learn about Eucalypts south of Ballarat.

In September Janine Duffy shared her knowledge of Koalas and Paul

Norquay and Elspeth Swan took members to the Basalt-Eganstown area. Ten members enjoyed a SEANA Spring camp in Donald capably hosted by the Donald History and Natural History group.

Tony Wilson entertained the audience gathered in October to honour Stella Bedggood with beautiful images of creatures with fur or feathers. A family day chosen to encourage children was hosted by Emily and Peter Noble at Lilwarre. We were guided by Deidre Murphy to gather water samples from the property dam to ascertain its health. Still in October a club camp was at Airey's Inlet, based in the Noble's holiday home and we were shown a variety of locations nearby. Many orchids were past their peak but of particular interest was a rare orchid, *Caladenia maritima*.

A mid-month excursion was held to visit Mt. Beckworth, mostly to enable Susan Kruss to see the correas she had read about. We found them to be in poor condition following our long dry spell. Just a few flowers were found but it was not correa season. Roger Thomas joined this trip and made a suggestion that the club considers action to facilitate poisoning a large struggling patch of Cork Oaks close to the dam. These are using meagre moisture of more benefit to native plants. This is now under consideration.

In November Carol Hall showed images of New England and other parts of U.S.A. which have been affected by Ice Age activity. Claire Dalman led another Mt. Beckworth trip, also visiting a few other locations; one to view a Wedge-tailed Eagle nest near Miners Rest. Several of our members have made repeat visits to watch a pair of adults raise two chicks. We observed them from white balls of fluff through scruffy, partially feathered birds to two young adults which left their nest about two weeks apart in December.

In December Andrew Skeoch, a sound recordist led us through images, graphs and sound in his presentation "Listening to the Wild". This was something quite new to us and very informative. Fran Hanrahan and John Mildren took us on a tour of local wetlands – yes, there is water in places. We then went to Rosebank where Bill Murphy hosted an enjoyable evening Christmas gathering.

After our usual break over summer, February began with Peter Muller teaching us about Ants and then leading an excursion to see them in various locations and the typical species preferred habitats.

Our year will finish in March with the AGM and members presentations on the topic *Fruits and Seeds* followed by an excursion led by

John Gregurke to Hepburn Shire Water Reserves which is a change from the syllabus destination of the Bellarine Peninsula.

A major achievement this year was the fulfilment of the commitment to improve signage for the La Gerche trail at Creswick. I express my appreciation and that of the club generally to John Petheram for leading the implementation of this project, obtaining the funding of \$10,947.64 and also for the lion's share of the planning and creative implementation so that it was completed to schedule and to the smallest of under-budget margins. We worked with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to complete this project. The completed, newly signposted trail was officially "opened" on Feb 23rd with 11 of our members in attendance.

It was also gratifying to note that the Victorian Government has legislated to establish a Canadian Park to include the Canadian State Forest and former pine plantation land. This is a pleasing outcome for this area. John Gregurke has been our club's contact with the various groups supporting the establishment. Thank you John for keeping our club apprised of the developments and for your part in achieving the outcome.

We receive many requests for money each year; some we ignore, some we support. A different request this year, for us, was to contribute via "crowd funding" to a project deemed worthy. We contributed \$200 towards building nest boxes for Brush-tailed Phascogales (Tuans) in the fire damaged Brisbane ranges where old growth hollows were burnt.

The club's use of communication technology has helped us stay in touch, keep members abreast of activities and reach out beyond our membership. Our secretary, Emily Noble makes good use of email to ensure we know about things that are of interest. This efficient and timely forwarding of information is appreciated. Members also provide information to our website and facebook page.

Again my thanks to the committee members who have shared in the organisation of our activities and led excursions. A club secretary is a lynch pin and I am sure we are all greatly appreciative of the time and effort Emily puts in to ensure everything is in order, and my particular thanks also to Les Hanrahan who always has a handle on the finances. This year I missed a considerable number of general and committee meetings because of travel. My thanks to Fran Hanrahan for chairing meetings and also for the regular chore

of compiling, printing and circulating our newsletter. I also thank Denis Thurgood as a link to the South East Australia Naturalists Committee and for his role as treasurer of that group.

I wish the club well with next year’s activities.

Peter Dalman

Memberships due

Should you wish to pay your membership at a bank or on line, our bank details are :

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc., Bendigo Bank, **BSB 633 108**
Account no. 1191 12290 ***Please remember to add your name***

<i>Ordinary member</i>	<i>\$35</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>\$55</i>
<i>Distant member</i>	<i>\$20</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>\$15</i>
<i>Newsletter postage (Ordinary member)</i>			<i>\$12</i>



Excerpts from Minutes of March meeting

Opening and Apologies; new president, John Gregurke welcomed 32 members, including new members, Annette Riddell & Mike Landry

Apologies: Carol Hall, Marie Keatley, Tim Fletcher, Mike Sorrell, Peter Muller, Dulcie Brooke, Anna Baulch, Margaret Rich

Business Arising from Previous Meeting: Finalising of La Gerche Trail grant report,

Correspondence: OUT :To the Honourable Lisa Neville MP and Adam Fennessy, DELWP: Email of support for the ongoing resourcing of SWIFFT including its video-conferences and website.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Les has renewed the Club’s FNCV membership: \$92. Peter D. made contact with Ian Pym who was happy to be interviewed by Susan Kruss about Stella Bedggood as part of her Master’s Thesis research.

Reports: Treasurer's Report: Opening balance \$8,962.12 I n c o m e \$129 Expenses \$1,597.86Closing balance: \$7,493.26.

SWIFFT Video Conference: It was the last Conference to be chaired by Andy A. due to retirement. Excellent presentations on monitoring and conservation efforts for Leadbeater’s Possum and Squirrel Glid-

ers along the Hume Hwy. 6 members of FNCB attended.

General Business

Re 2016 October's Club Meeting: field trip will look at orchids in the Smythesdale section of Enfield State Forest, with lunch at the Elder's property.

The FNCV's Juniors Group is coming up to camp at Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary over the Easter weekend (25th – 28th March). Please contact John Gregurke if you would like to lead them on a field trip over that weekend or just pop in and join in with their activities. Clarksdale, Devil's Kitchen, Jubilee Mine and Enfield SP are on the agenda so far.

Fran needs a volunteer to put together the newsletter for 2 or 3 months this year: Tammie Cornford volunteered. Yay!

April field trip is an afternoon evening event heading to Mt Rothwell Fauna Sanctuary for a night fauna survey. The cost is \$25 adult; \$15 children, with numbers needing to be finalised soon.

Steve Sorrell gave us a heads-up about the new OH & S requirements imposed by the City of Ballarat for any activities being carried out during an event supported by them: successful completion of an online OH & S program is required. May affect us one day.

Les proposed that the new Club President, John Gregurke, is added as a signatory to the Club bank account(s), and Elspeth Swan and Carol Hall are removed from the list of signatories now that they are no longer on the Committee.

Show and Tell/ Field Reports

Claire has been delighted to see White-browed Scrub Wrens join the Superb Fairy-wrens at a water/feed station in her backyard, along with the usual New Holland Honeyeaters.

Steve reported a huge brown stick insect (close to a foot long) at his daughter's place in Canadian, followed by a smaller, bright green stick insect about a week later. He also found an Australian Ring-neck at Allendale in Feb.

Paul, who now sees spectrograms (!) whenever he hears birdsong, struggled to understand how a Rufous Whistler could have whistled apparently constantly for over 2 minutes without taking a breath. An Echidna is still using his ground-level bird bath for water and bathing, and a native Rhododendron has been flowering for 3 months in his garden at Mt Egerton.

Denis reported that he saw a Collared Sparrowhawk fly across his garden in Beaufort with a still-struggling Starling in its talons. Upon landing on the nature-strip, the Sparrowhawk squeezed the Starling tightly, and with a last squeak of protest it expired.

Margaret reported the Ravens at her place in Nerrina are getting quite tame in response to some regular feeding, and will now come at her call. They are quite clever too, with one righting an overturned bowl. Crimson Rosellas have been feeding in her Silver Birch, and the bird bath has been a hive of activity, hosting Superb Fairy-wrens, White-faced Scrub Wrens, Eastern Spinebills, honeyeaters (mostly New Holland), White-throated Tree-creepers, Grey Thrush and Rosellas.

Ken reported the discovery of a Boobook Owl in Canadian, clearly photographed sitting on a street sign under a street light by one of his relatives. He hasn't known them to be in that area before.

On a scoping walk on the Grampians Peaks Trail, John P. saw a Tiger Snake that he could barely have got his hands around (not that he wanted to). What had it just eaten?

Emily invited members to come out to Scarsdale to see and try to distinguish between 3 different species of midge-orchids flowering on her block: Bearded, Variable and Sharp Midge-orchids.

John G. told us that Lake Burrumbeet, despite being less than 20cm deep, is still attracting great numbers of birds, including: 2 Wood Duck (an unusual occurrence there), 20 Shoveler, 2000 Shelduck, 300 Pelican, 5000 Grey Teal, 100 Pink-eared Duck, 10 Chestnut Teal, 1500 Avocet, 1500 Banded Stilt, 300 Red-capped Dotterel and 200 Red-necked Stint.



Excursion Saturday 2 April:

1.pm departure time

Field trip: *Serendip Sanctuary and Mt Rothwell*

to be led by John G. and Claire D.

Meet at 1pm at Federation University

CALENDAR 2016

April

- Fri 1 *Weather for field naturalists :*
Dr. Ian Bell, meteorologist
- Sat 2 **1.pm** Excursion: *Mt Rothwell night fauna survey* - Staff at
Mt Rothwell
- 8 - 11 SEANA Camp , Queenscliff
- Tues 22 Committee meeting at John Gregurke's

May

- Fri 6 *Ecology and conservation of the Wollemi Pine :* Heidi
Zimmer Associate Researcher, Fed U
- Sun *Exc. La Gerche Walk ,* Dr. John Petheram Club

Committee

President	John Gregurke	
Vice –Pres	Fran Hanrahan	
Secretary	Emily Noble	
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan	
Claire Dalman		Val Hocking
Peter Dalman		John Mildren
Bill Elder		Andy Arnold

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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